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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the growth of noncommercial FM radio and the service it provides to various regions of the United States and to large metropolitan areas. It concludes that the service provided does not reflect the policies for noncommercial broadcasting set forth by Congress and the Federal Communications Commission and that it does not represent a systematic plan of alternative local and national programming for diverse audiences. The paper points to the need for research into the status of noncommercial FM radio so that policy decisions can be made in keeping with the concept on which the system is based. (GW)

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NON-COMMERCIAL FM: PROFILES OF SERVICE

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The 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, incorporated in the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, includes a Congressional declaration of policy governing the operation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This policy projects the furtherance of the general welfare through encouraging "non-commercial educational radio and television broadcast programming which will be responsive to the interests of people both in particular localities and throughout the United States, and which will constitute an expression of diversity and excellence."[1] The responsiveness of non-commercial educational FM[2] to local and national interests is primarily a function of the ability of such stations to reach diverse audiences within the population. Reaching such audiences has been a combination of planning and blind luck. Planning on the part of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has allocated certain frequencies (between 88.1 and 91.1 mhz) for non-commercial FM broadcasting. However, the granting of the license, the power of the station, and the programming of the licensee combine to form an unpredictable situation. Who shall be served with what programming with what quality of reception has been left to chance.

This paper profiles the service of non-commercial FM in the United States: the growth of non-commercial FM, the service to various sections of the country, and the service to population areas.

GROWTH OF NON-COMMERCIAL FM

Eshelman described the growth of educational FM between 1945 and 1966; the early era study traced the emergence of 302 education FM stations

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1. 47 U.S.C. 396
2. The term "non-commercial educational FM," as used by the FCC (see 47 U.S.C. 501), includes stations licensed to non-profit institutions academic, religious and community.

over the two decades prior to the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.[3] During the decade since the 1967 Act, the number has increased nearly two-fold to 802 stations.[4]

---------- INSERT GRAPH 1 ----------

These 802 non-commercial FMs are distributed in the following power classifications:

10watt	383	48%
11w-2.99kw	186	23%
3kw-49.9kw	144	18%
50kw-99.9kw	48	6%
100kw+	41	5%

The preponderance of ten-watt non-commercial FMs is not a recent phenomena. Since the FCC began allocating ten-watt licenses to educational institutions in 1948, this has been a low-budget, relatively haphazard and popular means for many educational institutions to have a laboratory experience for a broadcast sequence or program. In 1965 Eshelman surveyed 72 FM stations of colleges with enrollments between 1,000 and 5,000.[5] He found 46% of the stations to be 10-watters. The similarity of this percentage with the 1975 figure for 10-watt stations indicates that the use of low power stations has kept pace with the overall growth of non-commercial FM.

SERVICE TO REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY

The authors used population data for nine areas of the country from Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS) for 1976[6] and individual station data

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3. David Eshelman, "The Emergence of Educational FM Broadcasting," The NAEB Journal, 26 (March-April, 1967), p. 59.
4. The early efforts of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in assisting "qualified stations" is well documented in: Elizabeth L. Young, "Public Radio in the Seventies," Educational Broadcasting Review, 4 (December, 1970), 47-52.
5. David Eshelman, "About College FM Stations," The NAEB Journal, 24 (Sept,/Oct., 1965), 33-42.
6. Spot Radio Rates and Data, 1976 (Skokie, Illinois: Standard Rate and Data Service, 1976).

from the 1976 Broadcasting Yearbook.[7] Not included in the graphs are stations serving Alaska and Hawaii -- three non-commercial FMs, two of which are 10-watt.

Non-commercial FM stations are licensed to areas of the country in disproportionate numbers to the populations served.

---------- INSERT GRAPH 2 ----------

There is no consistency between the population of an area, the size of the area and the number of non-commercial FM stations serving that area. New England, East North Central states and West North Central states are served by a higher number of non-commercial FM stations in respect to population. The size of the West North Central area necessitates a large number of stations, but the argument dissolves when applied to New England. Furthermore, the West South Central area is underserved by non-commercial programming despite its size.

When the powers of the non-commercial FM stations in each area are added to the mix, the inequities of service become more pronounced.

---------- INSERT GRAPH 3 ----------

The New England area is served primarily by 10-watt stations; the densely populated region warrants such service. The same rationale explains the large number of 100,000 kw stations serving the West North Central states. However, the Mountain and Pacific areas are served by few high-power non-commercial FMs. The large number of 10-watt licenses in these areas, as well as the East and West North Central areas, belies a consistency of service throughout the nation.

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7. Broadcasting Yearbook, 1976 (Washington, D.C. Broadcasting Publications, 1976).

SERVICE BY POPULATION SIZE

Using market data from SRDS,[8] non-commercial FM service to the 353 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) in the United States and service to communities outside SMSAs were profiled.

---------- INSERT GRAPH 4 ----------

Although stations serving communities outside the SMSAs are programming to low-density areas, the data indicate the highest proportion of 10-watt stations is found in this category. A few more high-power non-commercial FMs serve this broad category than other categories, but the number is meaningless when measured against the area which is served.

The top forty-four markets are served by non-commercial FM stations, but the forty-fifth market, Oklahoma City, has no non-commercial programming for its 800,000 inhabitants. Birmingham, Alabama, and Charlotte, North Carolina, are each served by one 10-watt station. Overall 137 of the 353 SMSAs, nearly 40 percent, have no non-commercial FM service. There is a correlation between market size and non-commercial service; smaller markets are less likely to have such service, but, in addition to those markets previously mentioned, Baton Rouge, Fort Wayne, and York, Pennsylvania, are also without non-commercial voices.

NON-COMMERCIAL FM SERVICE

Within each of the SMSA categories, non-commercial FM stations co-exist with their commercial counterparts. Congress declared that the non-commercial service needs special care and nurturing: "...that expansion and development of non-commercial educational radio and television broadcasting and of diversity of its programming depend on freedom, imagination and initiative

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8. See fn. 6.

on both the local and national levels."[9] In its 1973 Notice of Inquiry and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking concerning ascertainment of community problems by educational broadcast applicants, the FCC compared non-commercial to commercial broadcasting:

> The non-commercial broadcast service, by definition, differs markedly from the commercial service. It is designed to serve the educational needs of the community, and it is intended to meet cultural and informational interests often given minimal attention by commercial broadcasters who normally program to reach a large audience....Its (non-commercial broadcasting) strength, in fact, may derive from its ability to be innovative and to serve significant minority tastes, needs and interests.[10]

Non-commercial FM needs to be considered within the total broadcast service of a market to determine if the Congressional and FCC criteria for educational programming are being satisfied. The areas of the country and population centers breakdowns have shown where non-commercial FM is active and where such service is weak; the following section will provide mini-profiles of broadcast service in each of the SMSA categories. What programming is non-commercial FM providing to the community? To what degree is the programming duplicative of the commercial service? Six markets, one from each of the SMSA categories and each from a different area of the country, have been selected to begin the answer to these important questions.

Washington, D.C. is the eighth market and is served by twenty stations, with nine commercial FM stations and four non-commercial FMs. The non-commercial FMs are licensed to two universities, a community corporation, and Pacifica Broadcasting, which is the licensee to five non-commercial FM stations. Two of the non-commercial stations, one university and the community station, are NPR affiliates in the 50-99.9kw range. The former provides a diversified program service of black, jazz, country western,

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9. 47 U.S.C. 396.
10. Educational Broadcast and Renewal Applicants, 42 FCC2d 690-701, at 694.

spanish and bluegrass; the latter is predominantly classical with some talk, jazz and folk. Commercial FM service in Washington duplicates the non-commercial formats: black, spanish and a diversified-format university station are available, in addition to beautiful music, disco, album rock and progressive. The non-commercial alternative, the appeal to "minority tastes, needs and interests," is difficult to determine. Even the Pacifica station, part of a group concerned with community service, is in competition with two all-news stations.

Kansas City, the twenty eighth market, faces a similar problem. The classical music format of its 100kw non-commercial university FM is duplicated by a commercial licensee. The other two non-commercial FM services have religious licensees, a denominational college and a seminary, and formats. The FM commercial service includes black, rock, middle of the road, beautiful music and classical; six AM stations fill in the gaps. The university station brings NPR to Kansas City, as did the community station in Washington, but the programming surrounding NPR appears to be repetitive of commercial programming.

In Nashville, at least one of the non-commercial FM stations is clearly bringing alternative programming to the inhabitants of the fifty-first market. Commercial FM stations program middle of the road, country and progressive; a college station offers top-40, and the university station duplicates the progressive format, with the addition of twenty-five hours a week of Broadway, bluegrass, blues, black, classical and jazz. The primary initiative toward an alternative comes from a 100kw public library licensee. Supported by NPR, the station programs classical, cultural and educational programming.

Duplication continues as low as the 222 market. San Luis Obispo has progressive formats on non-commercial and commercial FM stations. The

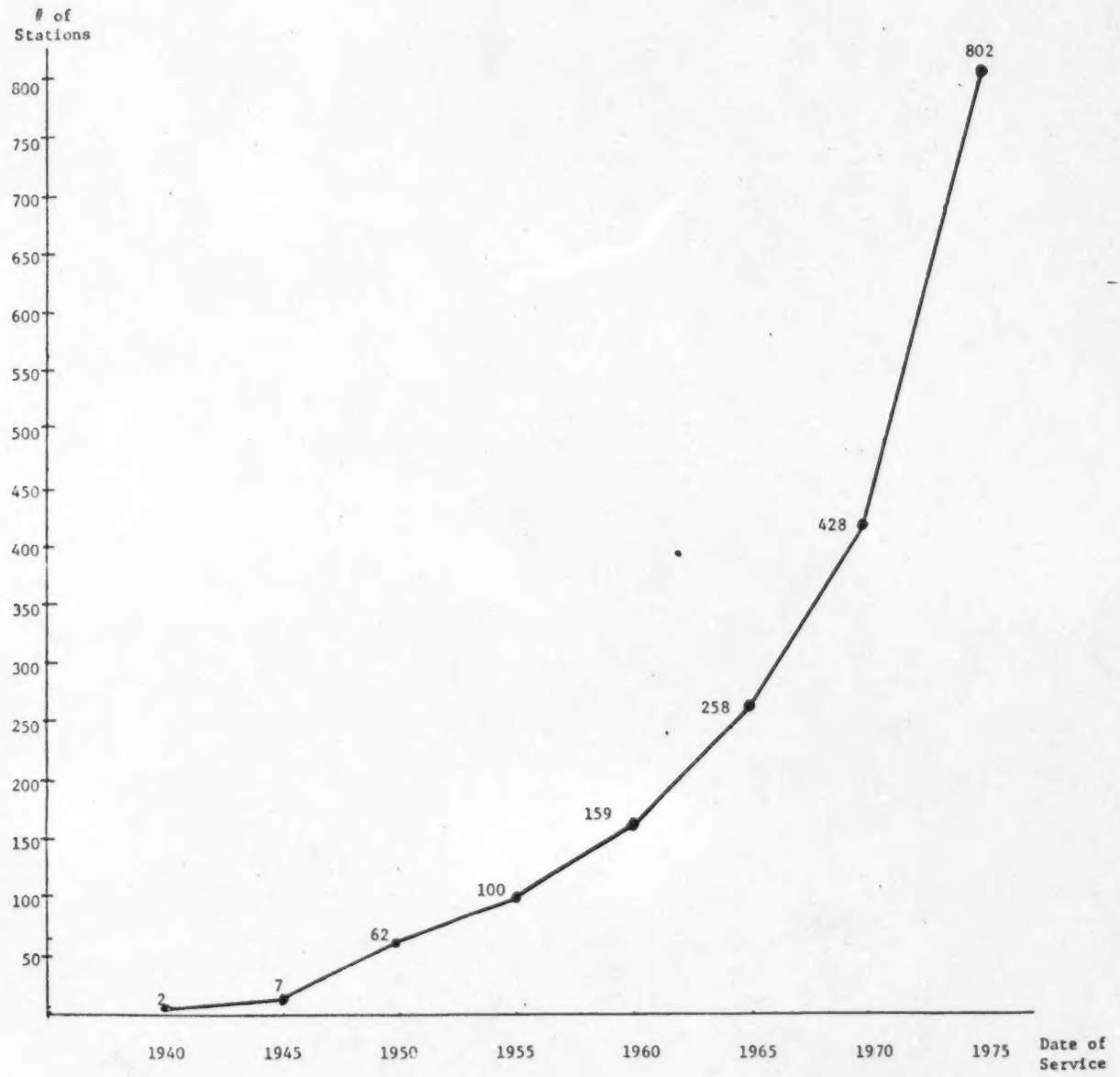
alternative to beautiful music, middle of the road and rock is found on a low powered, 76 watt, community station which programs NPR, classical, jazz, black, and country western.

In the smaller SMSAs and non-markets the pattern is repeated. Lewiston, Maine, is served by a 10-watt college station and a 30kw commercial FM, both with progressive and jazz programming. Far from a metro area, Bozeman, Montana's only FM station is a university licensee with a diversified programming of black, country western, classical and eighteen hours a week of jazz.

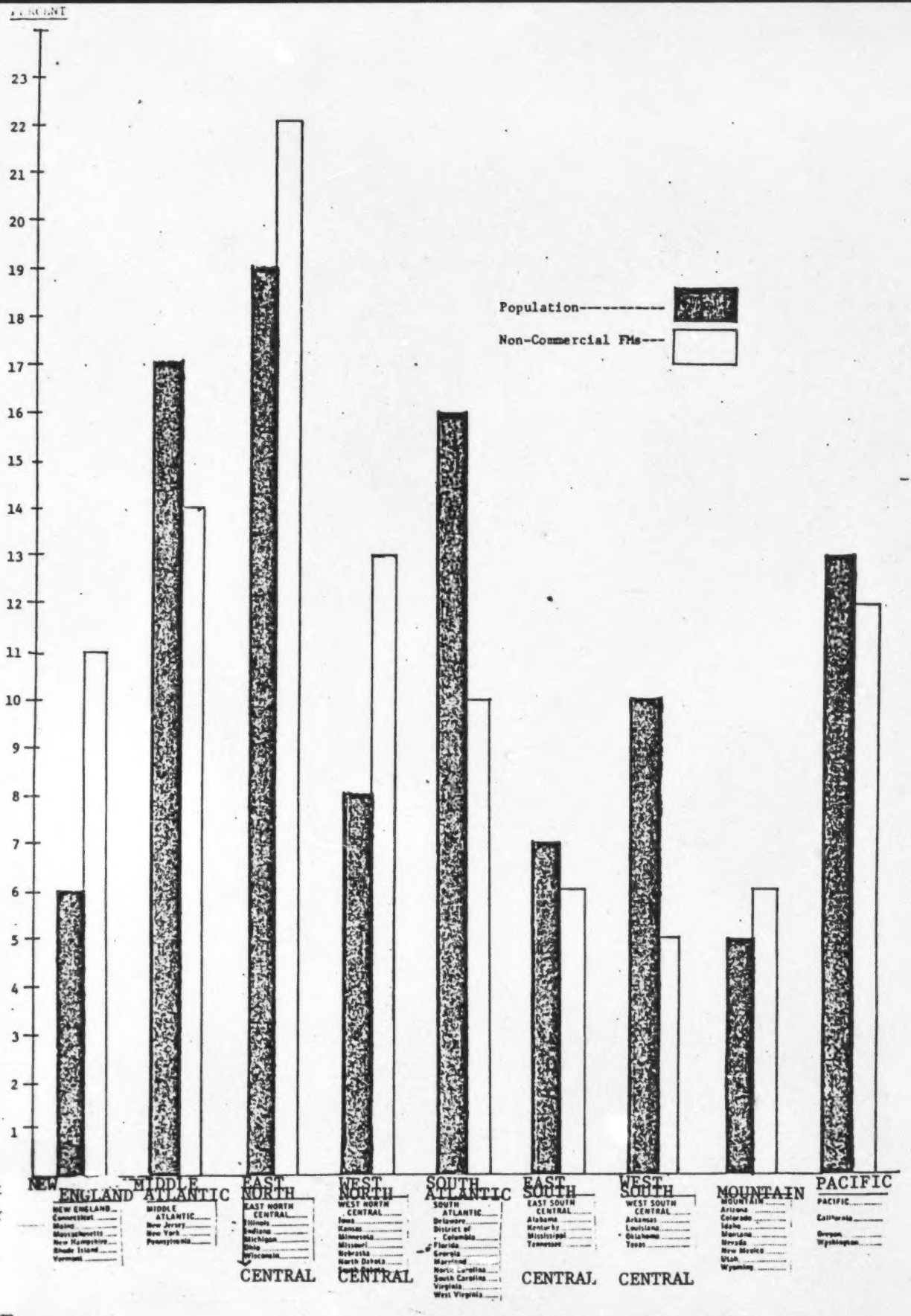
CONCLUSIONS

The data have profiled non-commercial FM service in the United States. The profiles do not match the concepts for non-commercial broadcasting set forth by both Congress and the FCC. Non-commercial FM service does not represent a systematic plan of alternative local and national programming to diverse audiences. The reception of an FM signal is not a function of where one lives, and only for the largest SMSAs is it a function of the size of the city one lives in. The content of non-commercial FM is independent of commercial programming. The major questions remain: Who is non-commercial FM serving? Is it alternative programming to minority needs?

Stronger profiles are needed to determine the service of non-commercial FM types: NPR stations, religious stations, university stations, et al. The profiles need to be filled in along the lines of the mini-profiles of six markets. Research needs to determine what is going on so that policy decisions can be made to match the system with the concept. The 802 stations already licensed will tend to force the creation of standards which correlate with current service unless there is a systematic effort to research, make policy, and initiate rules which reflect the public good as opposed to the status quo.



Graph 1: Growth on Non-Commercial FM, 1940-1975

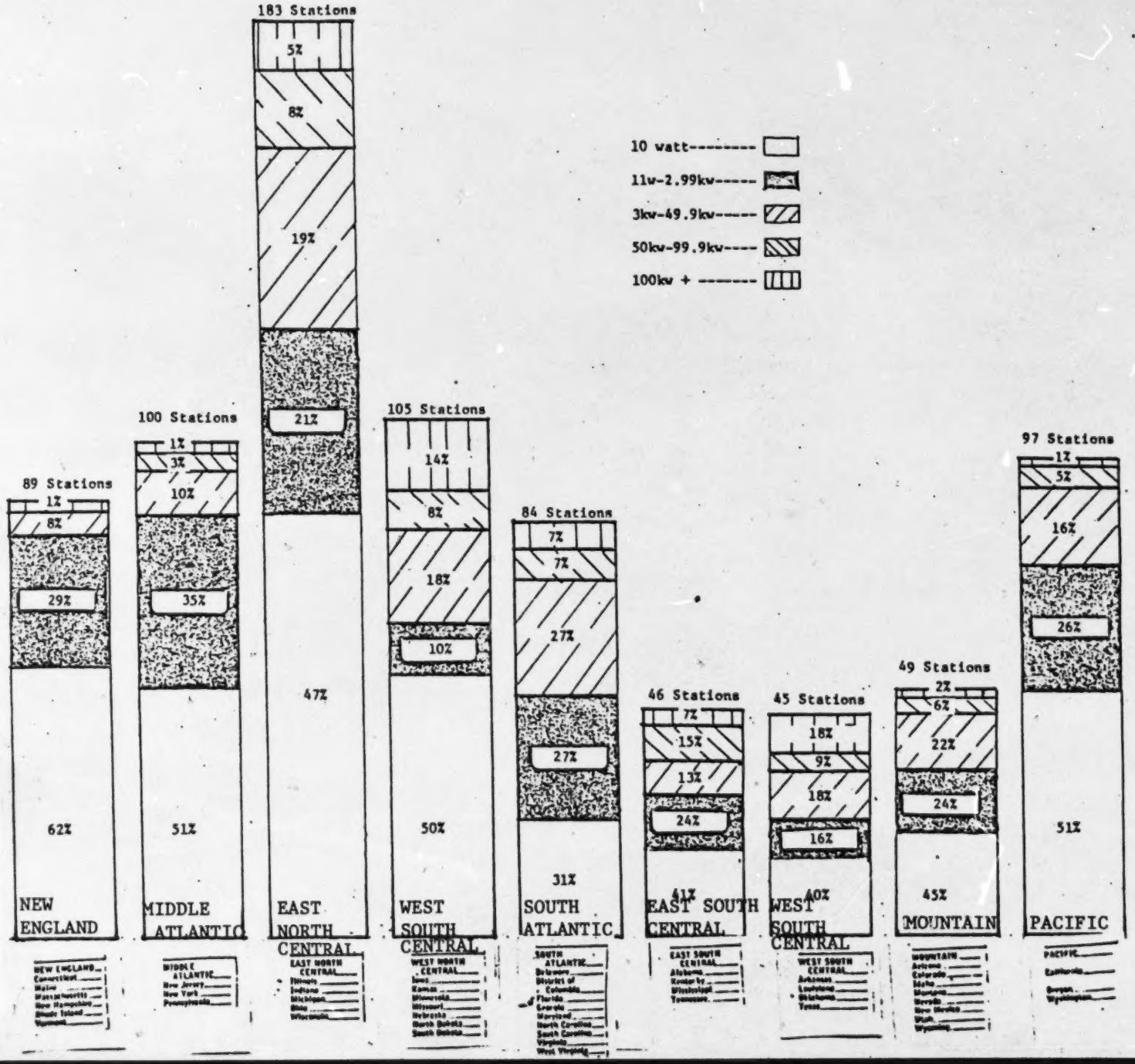


See next page for a clear copy of the breakdown of each region.

Graph 2: Relationship of Non-Commercial FM Stations to Populations Served

Graph 2. Continued

NEW ENGLAND	MIDDLE ATLANTIC	EAST NORTH CENTRAL	WEST NORTH CENTRAL	SOUTH ATLANTIC	EAST SOUTH CENTRAL	WEST SOUTH CENTRAL	MOUNTAIN	PACIFIC
Connecticut	New Jersey	Illinois	Iowa	Delaware	Alabama	Arkansas	Arizona	California
Maine	New York	Indiana	Kansas	District of Columbia	Kentucky	Louisiana	Colorado	Oregon
Massachusetts	Pennsylvania	Michigan	Minnesota	Florida	Mississippi	Oklahoma	Idaho	Washington
New Hampshire		Ohio	Missouri	Georgia	Tennessee	Texas	Montana	
Rhode Island		Wisconsin	Nebraska	Maryland			Nevada	
Vermont			North Dakota	North Carolina			New Mexico	
			South Dakota	South Carolina			Utah	
				Virginia			Wyoming	
				West Virginia				

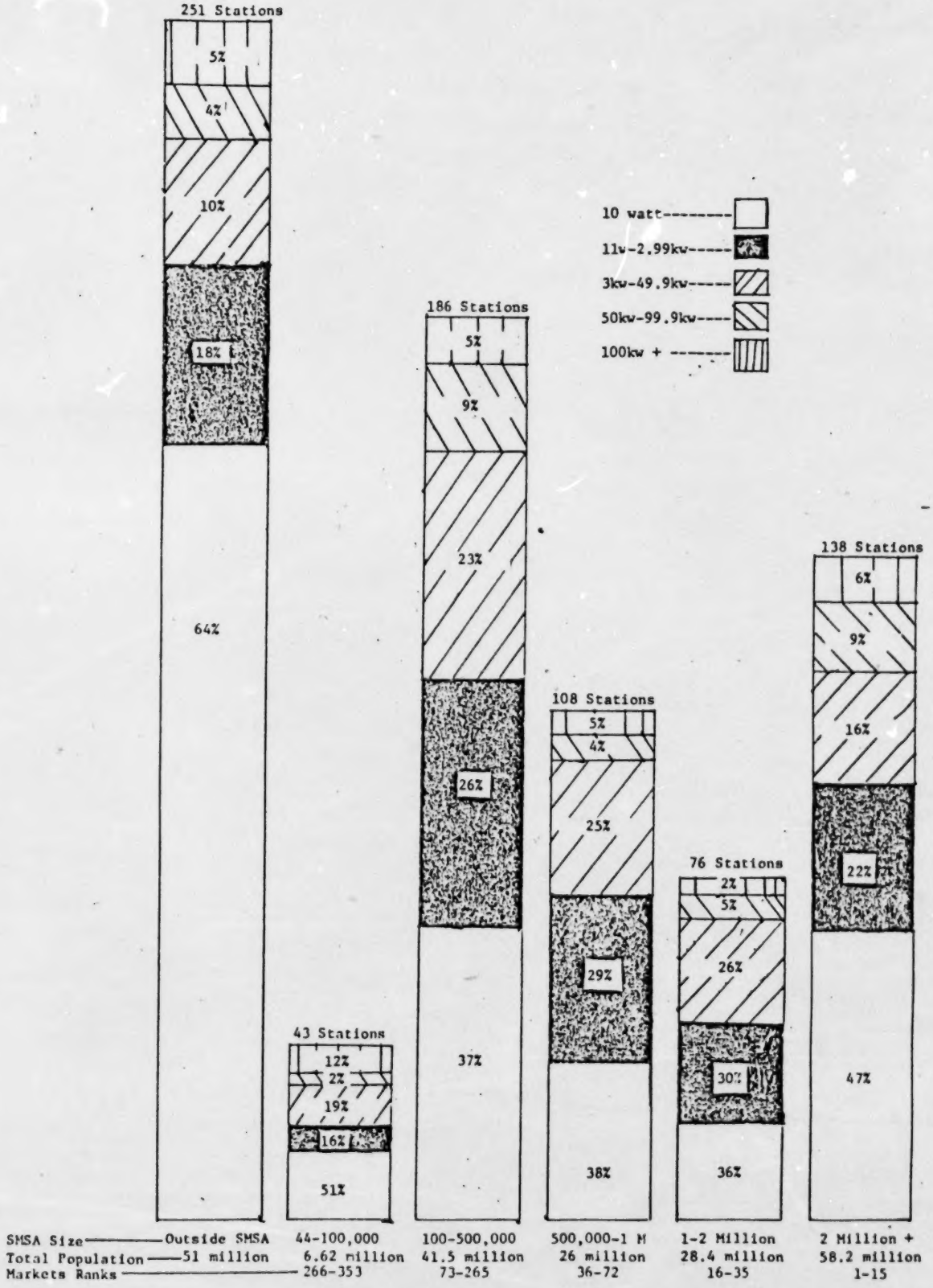


Graph 3: Non_Commercial FM Service by Station Power

See next page for a clear copy of the breakdown of each region.

Graph 3. Continued

NEW ENGLAND	MIDDLE ATLANTIC	EAST NORTH CENTRAL	WEST NORTH CENTRAL	SOUTH ATLANTIC	EAST SOUTH CENTRAL	WEST SOUTH CENTRAL	MOUNTAIN	PACIFIC
Connecticut	New Jersey	Illinois	Iowa	Delaware	Alabama	Arkansas	Arizona	California
Maine	New York	Indiana	Kansas	District of Columbia	Kentucky	Louisiana	Colorado	Oregon
Massachusetts	Pennsylvania	Michigan	Minnesota	Florida	Mississippi	Oklahoma	Idaho	Washington
New Hampshire		Ohio	Missouri	Georgia	Tennessee	Texas	Montana	
Rhode Island		Wisconsin	Nebraska	Maryland			Nevada	
Vermont			North Dakota	North Carolina			New Mexico	
			South Dakota	South Carolina			Utah	
				Virginia			Wyoming	
				West Virginia				



Graph 4: Non-Commercial FM Service to SMSAs and Non-Markets